A Radar Officer

(The following is an extract of a letter written 19 September 1995 by David Medley to John Saywell OAM)

By Lt (Sp) David John Medley

I was the first officer recruited directly into the RANVR for RDF duties on 1 November 1941 . This was in response to an ad which appeared in the Melbourne papers around September 1941. At that time I was the only one recruited and I suppose probably the only applicant at that time. I was transferred to the Admiral's staff in Sydney where I was assigned to the Flag Lieutenant, Lt Commander John Bath. Also on this staff was a Warrant Officer by the name of Jock Smart. Jock was a Telegraphist and had been assigned for RDF duties. He knew very little about RDF and was happy to have me aboard. Little did he know that I knew nothing about it either but I did have a Masters Degree in Physics, had been a ham radio operator for some years, and interested in electronics as far back as I could remember.This deficiency was soon rectified as I was given a crash course at the Radio Physics laboratory and access to all the classified material the RAN had at that time , which I absorbed like a sponge. After a soujourn at Flinders where I was supposed to learn how to be an officer, I was assigned to help with the RDF installations on "*Canberra*", presently refitting at Garden Island. On completion of this work early in 1942 I was assigned to her as RDF Officer. Subsequent events were recorded in "The Shame of Savo", so I will not repeat them here. (See Editor's note below)

I have only the haziest recollection of the "Bailey Boys" as I never had anything to do with the training school at HMAS *Watson*. I do recall that after I returned from the Savo affair, four RAAF officers and four RAAF mechanics were loaned by the RAAF to assist in the training of RDF operators.

Also about this time (late 1942), a distinguished A/S officer, Lt Tom Cree DSO, returned from Europe and was assigned OIC of the RDF section in Navy Office Melbourne, and I essentially worked for him for the remainder of my stay in the Navy.

Even at this time I was the only officer with a firm technical background and I suppose I was regarded as something of a "Whiz Kid". In any event I was frequently called upon to work on installations which had been beyond the capabilities of the personnal concerned. I remember working on the RDF installation on "*Queen Mary*" while she was in Sydney. I remember working all night on an obscure fault in a gunnery control Radar on "*Warramunga*", and I remember being sent to service RDF equipment on board a royal Dutch cruiser called "*Van Tromp*" in New Guinea. I remember vividly a spell in Brisbane with a US Navy submarine tender which was installing gunnery control Radars on "*Australia"* and "*Hobart"*. I was the liaison between the RAN and USN and I can recall that this was a fun time, and I learned a lot more about Radar from a Westinghouse Field Engineer who was supervising these installations.

I remember being sent to the USN PT boat bases on Guadalcanal and Savo Island sometime in 1943 to learn as much as I could about the SO Radars which the RAN had purchased for installation in the Fairmiles. These were subsequently installed at *Rushcutter* and I would suppose I supervised at least the first several installations. My most vivid recollections of this period were an overnight stay with a bunch of Coast Watchers who were waiting to be picked up by a submarine and deposited behind enemy lines and a ride on a PT boat from Guadalcanal to Savo.

As to the laboratory, I was nominally in charge of it while it was at *Rushcutter* from the time I returned from "*Canberra*" until I left the Navy in late 1945. I say nominally because I was away on special assignments a great deal of the time. On the other hand Alan Young was there all the time and will remember a lot more detail than I. The functions of the lab were as far as I can recall:

1. To provide a test facility for acceptance testing of Radar equipment being built in Australia.

2. To maintain a set of accurately calibrated test instruments which could be used to maintain standards of accuracy at RAN service bases.

3. To test new Radar equipment from overseas and to become familiar with it before it was installed in ships.

4. To develop new ideas as appropriate. In this area I worked on a Doppler Radar idea which has just now become a hot topic here in the USA. I also worked on Radar jamming equipment in the latter part of the war.

In 1945 it was decided to tranfer the lab to *Watson*, and Alan and I designed a building for it. Whether this was ever built I am not sure but I do know the lab was never transferred to Watson, but was reinstalled out at the Navy Stores facility at Leichhardt sometime in 1945 – 46.

Editor's Note. See "Shame of Savo", by Commodore Bruce Loxton, Chapter 8 "Preliminary Moves" pages 62 on, and Chapter 23 "The Verdict" pages 254 on.